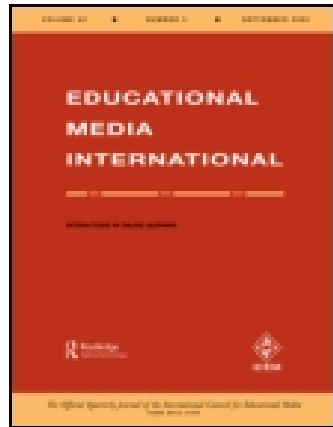


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## The use of Television in the Home in the Early Childhood Years

DR ROSE MUKERJI\*

WE ARE FOCUSING, when discussing aspects of this theme, on a small segment of the population. In some ways, it is not a very important part of the population. It does not vote. It has no buying power. It cannot even make a public complaint through the newspapers. In spite of that, the young child is important in his own right, and also because, as a child, he is a 'preview' of an adult.

We know that the media are having a bigger part in colouring a young child's ideas now than has ever been true in the past. Today's preschool child has never lived in a world without television. I remember feeling like a cousin to a dinosaur when a little three-year-old said to me, 'Were you born before television?' And I thought to myself, 'Television? I remember my brother's first crystal radio set!'

Now television has a history. In those countries where TV blankets the population, young children, too, are swamped by its presence. Most of what they see on TV is not intended for them. They watch whatever happens to be 'on' in their homes when they are not sleeping. Much of it is downright harmful to them; but they watch it anyhow.

As we look at programs specifically designed for children between the ages of three and six or seven, we see that the TV landscape is still relatively fresh and uncluttered. This is a distinct advantage to those of you who are actively influencing, or will, in the years ahead, be influencing, the pattern of that landscape in your own countries.

One thing this audience does not need is a discussion of the potential power and influence of television. My only reason for discussing this is to look at television through the prism of the young child and what is important for him.

I intend to do three things. First, I will focus

on some characteristics of a child's play and some characteristics of TV which seem to mirror each other. Second, I would like to discuss ways in which producers reach the parents—ways to support their educational television programmes for the young child in the home. Finally, we will see a 15-minute film from the *Ripples* TV series for young children. It is a series based on the conviction that there can be a good match between important educational needs of the young child and television.

When we think of the young child, we naturally think of his play. After all, what a young child does most is play. All too often, when he is supposed to be eating or getting dressed or getting ready for bed, he still manages to play, much to the aggravation of his parents.

I find it intriguing to compare the characteristics of a child's play with certain qualities of television. Let me mention just four of them:

(1) A child's play is intensely concentrated and focused; he honestly does not hear you when you call him.

Television technique can concentrate on an image so that it fills the screen with the eye of a grasshopper, and you are captured by that image.

(2) A child's play is full of sound and action. TV, too, is all sound and motion.

(3) When a child plays, he is not limited by time and space boundaries. He will be a baby at home one minute and a truck driver racing down the highway the next.

Television, too, fractures real time through simple dissolves. In a flash, it can cut from ground control to an astronaut kicking up dust on the moon.

(4) When a child plays, he is a terrifying monster one moment and the victim of that same monster the next. But, he can stop when he wants to—so he is psychologically safe. He is in control; that is why the act of play is so crucial to him.

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As for television, it may look like the real thing, but it is *not your real life*. There is always a degree of psychological distance between those TV images and you.

We can see that many characteristics of play are reflected in techniques on television. Maybe that is why a young child is literate in the TV medium long before he can read print. Maybe that is why television has something unique to offer the young child.

However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that the experience of television for the young child is comparable to his experience in play.

TV can stimulate ideas for play—but it is not a substitute for it. A child's play is his *primary* strategy for learning. It is how the outside world becomes part of his repertoire of knowing and understanding.

It goes without saying that TV is a source of information—but it is not a substitute for a young child who needs to explore and manipulate concrete materials as a basis for knowing. As adults, we see something being handled and know that it is 'squeezably soft'. A pre-school child needs to squash things in his own hands over and over again before he can tie together the meaning of a TV image of softness with the remembered feel in his own hands.

Television deserves a great deal of credit for the way it focuses on the feelings of people. But, just to see how people relate to each other on TV cannot substitute for a child's intimate and personal interaction with *live* people.

Because TV can spark a child's ideas, because TV can give him information, because TV can dramatise human feelings, it *has* a place in the young child's life. At the same time, we must pay due attention to the fact that it cannot substitute for the active, primary encounter with the real things in his life.

Therefore, home TV, or any TV, should be used for what it can offer young children and not be *over-used* so as to interfere with his active play, his active learning. In the home, parents are responsible for keeping TV for the young child in perspective. By the same token, parents can help a child make the best use of those TV programs which they like him to watch.

Because this morning's sessions are devoted primarily to the use of media in the home, I

would like to move on to consider how various producers of educational TV for young children try to reach out to the parent in the home—to help parents use the educational potential of their programs with their children.

Of course, in all countries, a greater number of young children are at home compared to those who are in school. By school I mean: day care centres, infant schools, nurseries, kindergartens or other forms of group care.

In the United States, the same programs are often available for both in-school and home use. In my own experience as producer or consultant for a variety of TV programs, I find no significant difference between home and school programs. For the most part, young children react exactly the same regardless of where they see the TV program—if they are free to do so. The real difference lies with the adults and how they participate, or do not participate, in the viewing and follow-up with the children.

Let me give you a few examples of this cross-over between instructional TV and home TV for young children.

One such series is called *Roundabout*. It is a series for three- to five-year-olds which was produced with US government funds and directed toward so-called educationally disadvantaged youngsters who are primarily children of poverty. In school, the *Roundabout* series, in the beginning, was widely used to compensate, somewhat, for inexperienced teachers. It is also broadcast during after-school hours for home viewing.

A companion TV series for parents gives weekly previews of the children's programs for the following week. It suggests ways to capitalise on a child's curiosity which has been sparked by the TV program—and how to do this through his natural activities. For example, how to use a trip, just around the block, to help a three-year-old learn things that are interesting and useful to him. The adult programs also deal with questions of discipline; they give information about sources of legal aid. They offer parents practical help in consumer education and consumer protection. You can see that, although *Roundabout* is for children, its companion adult TV series sees the needs of the child in terms of his whole family constellation.

Another TV series for children of three-to-five is called *Around the Bend*. It was developed to

serve the Appalachian region of our country. It is a mountainous area in which families are rather isolated from each other. In this region, similar to many other parts of the world, it is difficult to assemble children, particularly young children, into central schools. Therefore, the educational laboratory in that part of the country decided to mount an instructional TV series for its pre-school youngsters at home.

*Around the Bend* was carefully designed as a demonstration project to serve specific educational goals. It did not rely on television alone. The laboratory devised a support system for the home which used non-professional Home Visitors on a regular basis. They also provided a mobile classroom for some of the children.

Each week a Home Visitor brought materials for the child to use in connection with the daily TV program. Her primary rôle was to help the mother teach her child. Her contact with the child was only incidental; she avoided being put into the teacher rôle. It was not always easy, but that was her job.

Most of them contained a discussion about a child-rearing question. There is a brief statement about the content of the daily programs for the following week. It suggests follow-up activities and states the educational aims for them.

The Home Visitor's Guide meshes with the purpose of the TV program and with the Parents' Guide.

I want to mention two pre-school series with which I have no professional connection. Both are carefully produced with their own educational goals. They are *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood*. They, too, have specially prepared materials to support their use in the home. *Sesame Street* offers a magazine which has suggestions for parents and materials to use with children.

*Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood* sends out a two-page newspaper.

I cannot resist making a few comments about another pre-school series which is in a different category all together. *The Magic Garden* is commercial TV for home viewing by children from three- to five-years-of-age. As I worked on *The Magic Garden* I was delighted to learn that potential sponsors insisted on knowing what the educational benefits of the programs were likely to be for pre-school youngsters.

I find it very encouraging to know that commercial TV and their sponsors are paying some attention to the fact that, even though he has no buying power, the young child is an important part of the population. And that the media have an obligation to young children.

But, to come back to educational media. I have sketched several ways to support a child's home viewing by direct contact with the parent: through TV, through home visitors, and through inexpensive print.

At the beginning of this paper, I pointed out how certain characteristics of a child's play are mirrored in familiar techniques of TV production. I said I believe that the young child and TV are compatible—that TV, in moderation, has much to offer him. I firmly believe that there can be a good match between the two of them.

But how can we tell if a TV program is a good match for the young child? What can such a program do for him?

We do not need to dwell on the obvious things which television can do, such as bringing the face of reality so close that it is the 'next best thing to being there'; or of opening doors which are ordinarily closed to the young viewer because of distance or danger. If not for TV, how else could a youngster watch an elephant being treated for a toothache? But you know all about that.

Instead, let us look at *special* ways that television and the young child can have a good match—ways that have a special significance at *this particular stage of growth* of the child.

One of the most important, and difficult, tasks for a child is to move from the egocentric stage into the social stage, which has its roots in the early childhood years. It is also frightening to realise that the first seeds of prejudice are planted in the pre-school years. That is why it is urgent to use every means available to help a child become sensitive to other people, to care about other people. TV can help to do this.

Television is an excellent way of showing the rich *diversity* among people—people a young child may never see in his own limited family circle, in his own highly circumscribed neighbourhood. TV can help stir the idea that, 'Yes, each person is unique, and that that's good'.

At the same time, there are very basic *connections* which tie all people together. A young

child may not understand the language spoken by the TV child, but he gets the message when that same child bursts into tears. Young children are still limited in their ability to use and understand speech, but they are quite adept at understanding body language. Television, with its visual language, speaks to them. We must see to it that television speaks in terms that *foster human values*.

What else is important for a young child in these early years? What other monumental task is he tackling? Well, he is beginning to put down roots for developing his conscience—his belief of right and wrong, of good and bad.

Each society has its web of cultural values, complex and shifting as they always are. A youngster in every society catches those values in some very subtle and unexpected ways. Some of it he picks up through television. It is fascinating to examine a children's program to see what cultural values are imbedded in it: Who are the heroes? What rôles do women play? What are the images of 'success'?

Whether we are conscious of it or not, our cultural values creep into our programs and seep out into the minds of our children. It should be so. We *should* think seriously of the cultural values we *want* them to 'catch' from television.

I will select one other task which has special significance for the pre-school child: the task of forming concepts.

As the young child gathers bits and pieces of information and impressions, he puts them together into concepts. His concepts are still unstable—and often way off base—at this stage of development. He cannot yet think logically. Yet, the roots of concept formation begin in these early years.

Some of the ideas which young children are beginning to develop are important—not only for their current growth, but they continue to be important as they grow up. *It is this type of concept that television should attend to in programs for young children.*

Let me give you an example. This is the age when a child starts to move away from the confines of his family. He rubs up against other children and begins to realise that there is more to living than just what he wants, when he wants it, and how he wants it. If he wants the fun of

playing with other children, or if he wants to get along with adults, he finds it necessary to accommodate to other people. Thus, he begins to construct a concept of interdependence—a very big idea for a very small child.

The concept of interdependence cannot be learned from one TV program. It cannot be learned in one year. We, as adults, are still grappling with it, learning what it means in terms of 'the global village', in terms of the world community of people. But the roots for understanding the concept of interdependence reach as far back as the five-year-old child.

And I believe that TV can make a good match with a youngster as he builds his idea of how people relate to each other and why they need each other.

What can happen if we take seriously the assignment that television programs for young children should attend to basic concepts? Well, that is exactly what the *Ripples* series set out to do. *Ripples* is a TV series for five- and six-year-olds. It is built on basic concepts that are important, and that a young child can begin to understand *on his own terms*.

Let us back-track to the concepts behind one of the programs in this series and show how they were translated to the five- and six-year-old level.

We start with two basic concepts which are related. The first, which as you can tell, we borrowed from Socrates, is: 'Know Thyself'. Beginning with Freud, I know of no major psychologist, or for that matter no minor psychologist, who does not subscribe to the second, which is: 'Behavior is Caused'.

Now, what threads do we take from these two concepts around which to weave a TV program?

'Know Thyself'. One way to know ourselves is to know our history. Each person comes into this world with a history. He belongs to a specific family, to a particular cultural group. This personal history is part of him. To some extent, it makes him what he is.

'Behavior is Caused'. It implies that there is a reason behind a person's actions. A person makes choices about what he will do. Therefore, he is responsible for making things happen, for accomplishing what is important to him.

How did we dramatise these ideas for TV on the five- and six-year-old level?

How best this can be illustrated is with a program called, 'How did I get to be Me?' Even the title suggests that it has something to do with a child's own past, no matter how short that past is. Five-year-old Tony not only relives his personal history in his family, he wonders

what he would be if he had a different family history.

But what is his real problem now? What does he wish would happen? And what does he have to do, *himself*, to make it happen?

## Audio-Visual Media in the Kindergarten

DR WOLFGANG BRUDNY\*

I SHOULD LIKE to deal with this question by posing the two following questions:

1 What part will be played by the audio-visual media in the event of an accelerated development of television programmes for pre-school age groups?

2 What are the objectives of the audio-visual media, and how can the different forms of implementation be developed for the attainment of these objectives?

Any answers to these questions must take earlier developments into account and explain the background against which media decisions in the kindergarten are better understood. Kindergartens in Germany are currently being subjected to close scrutiny. The realisation that younger age groups have in the past always been neglected for education processes has resulted in a number of reforms being introduced and it is generally known that there were subsequent discussions on such concepts as equality of opportunity, early cognitive and instrumental learning and also social learning.

In March 1973, the German Education Council approved the recommendations of the Education Committee on the setting up of a model programme for curricular development in the elementary sector. These proposals now represent the framework for subsequent developments on a regional level.

When planning media for pre-school education, we have to take into account the development of so-called 'didactic units', which are—for their part—an essential ingredient of curricular planning. In this connection, the proposals of the education committee state: 'It is our aim to create a number of stimuli related to

children and their environmental situations and to present these in a very generalised form. By stimulus in this context we mean the entire range of planned conditions and materials that prove to be suitable for guiding and supporting children's learning processes. It includes both the stimulating environment and special materials, and also a process of communication, activities between children, activities between children and teachers and activities between teachers and other adults.<sup>1</sup>

This already indicates that the development of learning stimuli, including audio-visual materials, is not solely restricted to the instrumental or the purely cognitive form of learning. It is rather concerned with those processes of environmental experience that are relevant for the child and a suitable structure for these processes and also with a suitable method of communicating didactics and methodics to children. It is a matter of course that situation-related learning takes pride of place and that this prepares the way for such means as films, slides and tapes in particular.

Curriculum development for the elementary sector might well produce a certain amount of doubt, as it is usually a system-related learning stimulus that comes to mind. For this reason, we should start on the precept that there is a precedence of 'unsystematic learning of life', as Deissler<sup>2</sup> describes it, before planned learning and that, as we already know from Piaget, the change from visual-concrete to logical-concrete learning takes place at about the age of six. The curricula and didactic units that have been developed recently in Germany, particularly in the German Youth Institute,<sup>3</sup> take this into account. These make allowance for the fact that the child should enjoy learning, that experience plays a central part and that the way to autonomous

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